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191457Z Feb 06

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 LAGOS 000251

SIPDIS

STATE PASS DOE FOR DAS JBRODMAN AND CGAY
TREASURY FOR ASEVERENS AND SRENENDER
COMMERCE FOR KBURRESS
STATE PASS TRANSPORTATION FOR MARAD
STATE PASS USAID FOR GWEYNAND AND SLAWAETZ
STATE FOR DS/IP/AF, AF/EX, DS/IP/OPO, DS/ICI/PII, DS/DSS/ITA
LONDON PASS TO AMBASSADOR CAMPBELL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/18/2016

TAGS: [EPET](#) [PGOV](#) [ASEC](#) [PTER](#) [KHLs](#) [PINR](#) [ETRD](#) [CASC](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: NIGERIA: HOSTAGE-TAKING, SITREP #3

REF: LAGOS 250 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for Reasons 1.4 (D & E)

Summary

1. (C) MEND released a statement claiming the hostages are in good health. Willbros has contacted all next-of-kin. Delta State governor James Ibori has been appointed Chair of a committee to resolve the hostage crisis. Due to security concerns, Shell has not been able to fully assess damage to its Forcados export facility, and it remains closed. Along with other closures, Shell's daily production has been reduced by roughly 500,000 bpd. A feeder line to the Escravos-Lagos gas pipeline was attacked, disrupting gas deliveries to Nigeria's largest power plant. End summary.

Hostage Welfare Update

2. (SBU) Willbros has contacted the next-of-kin for all of their employees. None of the three AmCits had registered with the Consulate or signed Privacy Act waivers.

3. (U) In a statement released via to Bloomberg, MEND stated "the hostages are in good health." The statement also said the hostages had been "scattered around communities."

4. (C) The Thai Embassy in Dakar, and Egyptian and Philippine Embassies in Abuja have contacted Embassy Abuja for information regarding their kidnapped nationals. They have not requested specific assistance.

Energy Update: Shell Confirms Loss of 518,000 bpd

5. (C) Shell has been unable to perform a damage assessment of the Forcados Terminal, but aerial photos indicate the damage may not be as extensive as previously thought. A detailed damage assessment will be done as soon as security permits, with the next attempt scheduled for tomorrow. Forcados remains closed as does the "Sea Eagle" FPSO which produces 115,000 bpd. The "Sea Eagle" was closed as a precautionary safety move. It has not suffered any damage nor been subjected to any militant activity. These shutdowns, compounded by the Cawthorne Channel closure, reduce Shell's daily production by approximately 500,000 bpd, or nearly 25 percent of national production. Shell resumes crisis group meetings tonight with Willbros, USG and HMG government representatives, and Control Risk Group advisors. Scotland Yard representatives arrive today and will attend.

Delta State Hostage Committee Formed

6. (C) At the behest of President Obasanjo, Delta State governor James Ibori has been tasked to lead a nine-member committee to resolve the hostage crises. Ibori has headquartered the committee in Warri, Delta State. Ibori told us he has put out feelers to the kidnappers, but there has been no direct communication yet. Ibori also said President Obasanjo assured him no military action would be taken for the time being in order to give Ibori a chance to negotiate a peaceful resolution.

Military Activity; JTF Plans Military Build-up

7. (S/NF) However, in a move the militants will likely see as aggressive, a senior military official said a planned

buildup of the JTF is to begin soon. This larger force, with a new commander, will increase GON land, sea, and air patrols of the area.

18. (C) The Nigerian military has employed four boats out of Warri to patrol and control the waterways. The boats were reportedly engaged by the militants, and five militants were captured.

Gas Pipeline Attack: Power Production Down 200 MW

19. (C) Nigerian Gas Company (NGC) executive A.L. Yakubu confirmed last night's attack on the Escravos-Lagos pipeline. As a result, Egbin Power Plant, Nigeria's largest, has cut its production of power. Yakubu reports a feeder line, rather than a main line, was cut, so gas pressure to Egbin is reduced. Power production has been reduced from 1250 MW to 1050 MW and may further reduce. NGC hopes to send a repair crew to begin fixing the gas line tomorrow.

More Detail on Barge Attack

10. (C) Chevron security personnel provided more details about the barge attack and hostage-taking. The Willbros barge was approached by 6-7 speedboats with occupants waving white flags, and the barge security contingent allowed the boats to come closer. When the boats reached the barge the militants, armed with heavy machine guns and a rocket propelled grenade, began firing. The forty-five expatriates onboard tried unsuccessfully to hide in a secured room; the militants took only nine hostage because their boats would not hold more. The remaining expatriates were evacuated to Warri.

11. (C) Secretary of the Bayelsa State Government Dr. Igali complained to Embassy PolCouns that the Federal government is to blame for the recent militia attacks. The Nigerian military attacks on Nkeronkoko were ordered at the highest levels of the government, despite agreement not to retaliate against the militants for the last hostage taking, said Igali. Another source claiming connection with MEND says more militia attacks are planned.

Comment

12. (C) There has not been any reported activity by the militants or the Nigerian military today. Both are likely catching their breath, waiting warily to see if the other one will act. We hope both will remain idle so that the hostage negotiation will have a chance to occur. However, the stakes now are higher than during last month's crisis which ended barely three weeks ago. Intense and perhaps protracted negotiations lie ahead. End comment.
BROWNE